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News and Notions of the Stage

THE REVIEWING STAND

By Alexander Woollcott

AMONG the good things that Balieff has given us in the new bill of the Chauve-Souris is a song they have been singing in France for more than two centuries, but which, as far as we can recall, had not been sung in this town in our time. That is the half jaunty, half pensive ballad called "*Le Mort et Convoi de l'Invincible Malbrough.*" Every Frenchman knows it—knows it so thoroughly that he could not for the life of him tell when and where it first entered into his memories any more than any of us can remember at what time and place we first heard "Yankee Doodle."

There are those who say its tune runs back to the time of the Crusades—that the knights of Godfrey de Bouillon roared it under the very walls of Jerusalem, leaving it behind them in Arabia, where you can hear it to this day. Certainly its association with the mock ballad of the dread Duke of Marlborough goes back to the Battle of Malplaquet, in 1709, at a time when his was a name wherewith the *bonnes* could frighten children into good behavior. Unable to slay or rout the fellow, it was the French way to take revenge in derisive song, and the legend has it that at nightfall after the disastrous battle a French soldier, who was minus his shirt by this time and had not eaten in three days, distilled for himself a sweet consolation by inditing this funeral dirge for an enemy then only too painfully alive.

The song spread along the line from tent to tent and became one of the homely and cheerful possessions of the people. Years later—later by three score years and ten—it was taken to court. A son had been born to the alien Queen, and to Versailles was summoned a ruddy, buxom peasant woman to be his nurse. With her from the country she brought the old tune which, as like as not, her grandfather had heard sung along the road in the confusion after Malplaquet. So the cradle of the little chap, who was to vanish into history as the Lost Dauphin, was rocked to the incongruous melody of "*Malbrough s'en va-t-en guerre.*"

It caught the ear and jingled in the memory of the Austrian, to whom it was a new thing in a land where so much was still new. She made it the fad of Versailles. It was played by the fiddlers of the court. It was hummed and roared in the stables. It spread to Paris and became the rage. Its lugubrious tale was wrought in tapestries and embroideries. It was painted on fans and carved on snuff boxes. The "*Mironton, mironton, mirontaine*" dogged the stranger's steps along the Seine much as the "What, never? Well, hardly ever" refrain became epidemic in this country when "Pinafore" was new. The song maddened the young Goethe, agape in the Paris of Louis XVI. It was a favorite with Napoleon, who, though no great shakes as a barytone, made a point of singing its catch lines as he put foot to stirrup for any entry into battle.

* * *

Up on the Century Roof now its elegiac quatrains are acted out with mock solemnity by a very troupe of puppets escaped from some lunatic Guignol. The sound of the accompanying verses stirred many a memory in this listening chronicler. A memory of an old woman in a smoky, sausage-festooned kitchen of a Norman *estaminet* bending over the fire and beating an omelette to the rhythm of "*Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.*" A memory of three little *poilus* in weather stained *horizon bleu*, jogging under a wintry moon along the white, frosted road that led to Nancy and singing as they went "*Malbrough s'en va-t-en guerre.*" A memory of a dirt floor farmhouse on the Britanny coast—a lonely farmhouse built when the great Louis was King of France. And there one night last summer, while the crowd sat around the wall to listen and someone with a guitar strummed a lazy accompaniment, our own Kathleen Howard stood and sang this ancient song.

Above all, a memory of "Trilby." Occasional references to that book of books will keep creeping into this column as King Charles's head into Mr. Dick's memorial. Every reasonable effort will be made to avoid them, but surely this time it is necessary. For that night when Taffy and the Laird and Little Billee went to the *Cirque des Bashibazoucks* to hear *La Svengali* sing—the night they learned that it was *Trilby*—the greatest voice of all time imparted its immeasurable heartache to this foolish old ballad. It is a matchless description, that passage wherein Du Maurier follows verse by verse the mounting anxiety, the deepening sense of an irrevocable calamity with which she could invest the coming of the messenger. Hear him:

"All this time the accompaniment had been quite simple—just a few obvious, ordinary chords.

"But now, quite suddenly, without a single modulation or note of warning, down goes the tune a full major third, from E to C—into the graver depths of *Trilby's* great contralto—so solemn and ominous that there is no more weeping, but the flesh creeps; the accompaniment slows and elaborates itself; the march becomes a funeral march, with muted strings and quite slowly:

Aux nouvelles que j'apporte—
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine!
Aux nouvelles que j'apporte,
Vos beaux yeux vont pleurer!

"Richer and richer grows the accompaniment. The *mironton, mirontaine* becomes a dirge:

Quittez vos habits roses—
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine!
Quittez vos habits roses,
Et vos satins brochés?

"Here the ding-donging of a big bell seems to mingle with the score . . . and very slowly, and so impressively that the news will ring forever in the ears and hearts of those who hear it from *La Svengali's* lips:

Le Sieur Malbrouck est mort—
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine!
Le Sieur—Malbrouck—est—mort!
Est mort—et enterré!

"And thus it all ends quite abruptly.

"And this heartrending tragedy, this great historical epic in two dozen lines at which some five or six thousand gay French people are sniffling and mopping their eyes like so many Niobes, is just a common old French comic—a mere nursery ditty like 'Little Bopeep.'"

Du Maurier's Drawing of Lady Malbrough for "Trilby."
—Courtesy of Harper & Bros.

* * *

But the full ballad as it has been handed down through the generations is much longer than two dozen lines and here, for once in a way, is the whole thing:

Le Mort et Convoi de l'Invincible Malbrough

Malbrough s'en va-t-en guerre.
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.
Malbrough s'en va-t-en guerre,
Ne sait quand reviendra.

Il reviendra z-a Pâques.
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine,
Il reviendra z-a Pâques,
Ou à la Trinité.

La Trinité se passe
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine,
La Trinité se passe
Malbrough ne revient pas.

Madame a sa tour monté,
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.
Madame a sa tour monté
Si haut qu'elle peut monter.

Elle aperçoit son pag'e
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.
Elle aperçoit son pag'e
Tout de noir habillé.

Beau pag'e, ah! mon beau pag'e,
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.
Beau pag'e, ah! mon beau pag'e
Quell' nouvelle apportez.

Aux nouvell's que j'apporte,
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.
Aux nouvell's que j'apporte,
Vos beaux yeux vont pleurer.

Quittez vos habits roses,
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.
Quittez vos habits roses
Et vos satins brochés.

Monsieur d'Malbrough est mort,
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine,
Monsieur d'Malbrough est mort.
Est mort et enterré.

J'lai vu porter en terre,
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.
J'lai vu porter en terre,
Par quatre z-officiers.

L'un portait sa cuirasse.
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.
L'un portait sa cuirasse,
L'autre son boucher.

L'un portait son grand sabre.
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine,
L'un portait son grand sabre,
L'autre ne portait rien.

A l'entour de sa tombe.
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine,
A l'entour de sa tombe,
Romarins, l'on planta.

Sur la plus haute branche.
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine,
Sur la plus haute branche,
Le rossig'nol chanta.

On vit voler son ame.
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.
On vit voler son ame.
Au travers des lauriers.

Chacun mit ventre à terre
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.
Chacun mit ventre à terre.
Et puis se releva.

Pour chanter les victoires,
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine,
Pour chanter les victoires
Que Malbrough remporta.

La ceremonie faite,
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.
La ceremonie faite.
Chacun s'en fut coucher.

Les uns avec leurs femmes.
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.
Les uns avec leurs femmes,
Et les autres tout seuls.

Ce n'est pas qu'il en manque.
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.
Ce n'est pas qu'il en manque
Car j'en connais beaucoup.

Des blondes et des brunes.
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.
Des blondes et des brunes
Et des chataign's aussi.

J'n'en dis pas davantage.
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.
J'n'en dis pas davantage,
Car en voilà z-assez.

From this version is carefully omitted the sinful final quatrain especially written for the Russian zanies on the Century Roof. In his ambling preamble to the ballad there, Balieff has the hardihood to repeat the old tale about the days when this song was so all-pursuing in Europe. It seems a Frenchman astray in London and bound for Marlborough street could not remember its name, but got there all right by hailing a cab and enriching the cabby's day by singing "*Malbrough*" to him. Balieff also proudly claims for this ballad the distinction of never having been turned into what he balefully calls a fawx trawt. Perhaps so, perhaps not. But the tune did cross over to England and thence to us nearly a hundred years ago. And we hear it every year of our lives, for the words that it picked up in England were "We won't go home until morning."

Anyway, it is altogether delightful to hear it sung so solemnly, so nonsensically in the Chauve-Souris. And perhaps, if we are all very good, some day Balieff may bring over another French song that has hidden too long in old French buvettes and garrisons—"*Aupres de ma blonde.*"

BRADY WEEK.

LAST week on Broadway was set aside as William A. Brady week—dedicated entirely to his adventures in art. On Monday night came "Swifty," a bit of flagrant theatrical balderdash, written under a delusion which has been losing a little ground of late. As the late Bert Leston Taylor once observed, the public is not such a fool as it looks.

Then on Tuesday came a piece of quite another sort—Paul Géraldy's "Aimer," a fine, penerating, thoughtful comedy, beautifully acted by its small company—especially by Grace George and Robert Warwick. For Miss George as an actress we have always had the liveliest admiration. For Grace George as a translator of French plays our enthusiasm is somewhat tempered.

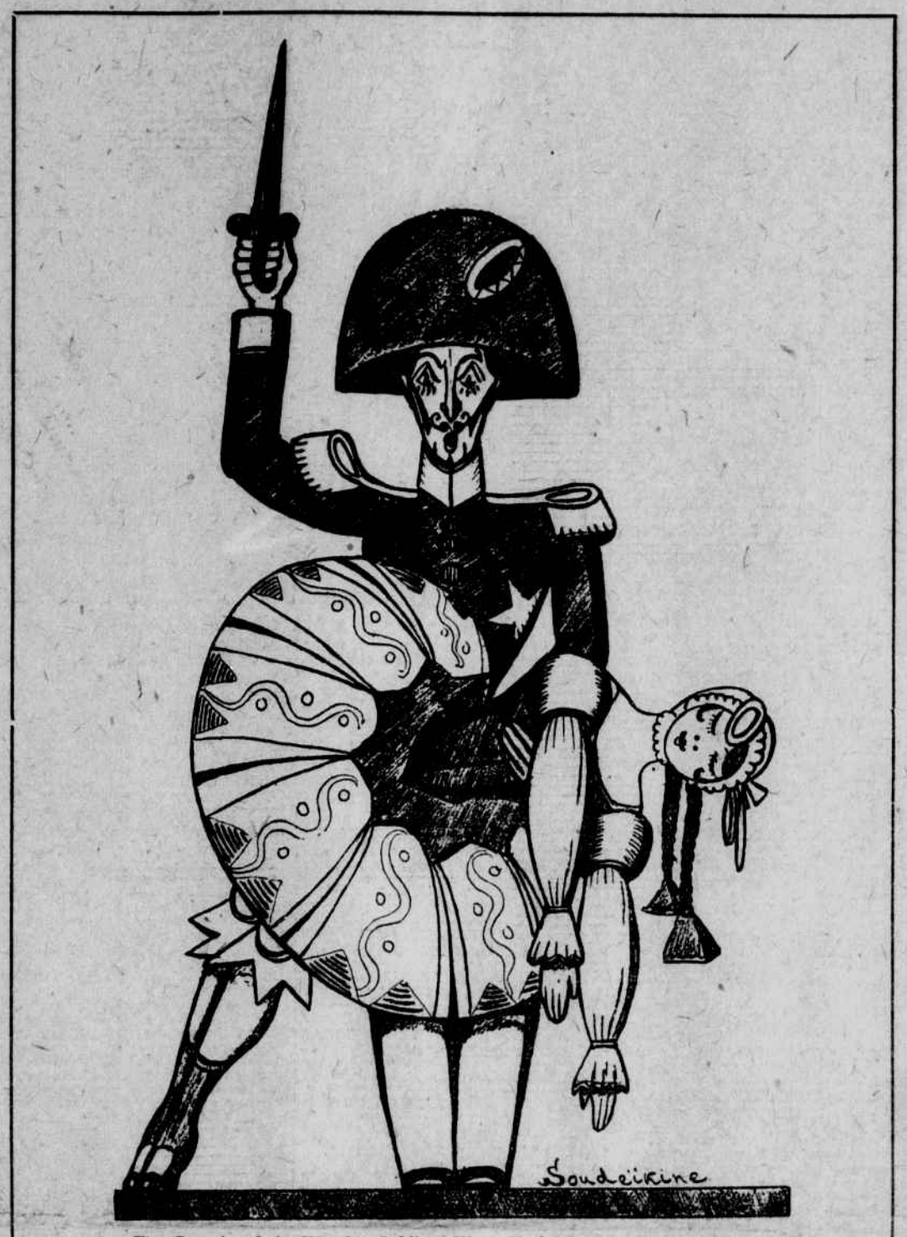
Against the ineptitudes of our translators we are always protesting raucously and without hope. Too many of our managers seem to share the viewpoint once expressed by our old friend, Mr. Vincent Crummles of Portsmouth, who, in the bitterness of having to lift a play from the French before the following Monday, cried out angrily:

"Damme, if I haven't often said that I wouldn't have a man or woman in my company that wasn't master of the language, so that they might learn it from the original and play it in English and save all this trouble and expense."

The transmogrification of "Aimer" into "To Love" is by no means a bad job, as such jobs have been done on Broadway in recent years, but it does leave something to be desired. When the "*on dit*" comes out as "one says," it is as jolting as that incredible "Heigho!" with which the more nonchalant characters in bad English novels are always sinking into chintz-covered chairs. Or as prim and improbable as the "It's a fine day, is not it?" of the Jane Austen stories.

Such playwrights as Géraldy, never, in their own tongue, strive for the lifelike, broken casual speech which lends such veracity to the dialogue written by our own O'Neill. Or, for that matter, by Galsworthy. There is a certain precision, a certain canonical elegance in the language they suffer their puppets to utter. And when such language is lifted over into English there lies a special burden on the adapter, who must remember that any survival of Latinity in an English text is likely to add a mincing and pedagogical gait to its speech which may have been no part of the first author's intention.

There is just enough of this lingering in the promptbook they are using now at the Bijou to imperil from time to time the precious illusion of life. There are times when you, the eavesdropper, lose somewhat the sense that you are listening in on the heart-to-heart talks of three tormented human beings. You feel rather that you are attending a rather self-conscious conference, an impromptu platform debate on love between—well, let us say between Clayton Hamilton, Agnes Repplier and William Lyon Phelps. And wouldn't that be fun!



The Captain of the Wooden Soldiers Woos Katinka of the Chauve-Souris.
—From a Drawing by Soudeikine

Many Unhappy Returns.

The cost of producing the first "Music Box Revue" is unreliably reported to have been $200,000 and that of the forthcoming issue to be $250,000—but at that, almost anything is possible when Irving Berlin, Sam Harris and Hassard Short get together and begin ordering bales of dress goods. The opening performance has been oversubscribed more than four times, which puts it on a par with the latest Ziegfeld "Follies," for which F. Ziegfeld, Jr., had to return more than $30,000 for unfilled orders for the opening night.

The Talk of Broadway

By FRANK VREELAND

"ROSE BRIAR," the impending Booth Tarkington play, promises to call for lots of attention in more ways than one. It was written by Tarkington in order to uphold Emerson's well known law of compensation, so far as Billie Burke is concerned. Last season Miss Burke appeared in "The Intimate Strangers," which, as everybody ought to know now with any pretense to being acquainted with roadway, was originally meant to be grafted on the talents of Maude Adams. It was written about a character who had passed the first bloom of youth, but try as desperately as she might Miss Burke could not look anything but young.

So the author promised to write for her a play in which she would be justified in appearing youthful. In addition to Miss Burke the cast on the male side will be topped off with Allan Dinehart and his mellifluous voice and eyes. Mrs. Lydig Hoyt, moreover, will return to the metropolitan stage in this piece after a summer spent absorbing plays and technique in stock out West.

A further member of the cast will be Don McGibney, who is to be noted under the following counts: (1) He is a graduate of Hamilton College. (2) he was an aviator in the war. (3) he is a novelist who sells. Last spring he caused the book reviewers to draw a bead on him with "Slag." He is now having a novel published serially in the *Metropolitan Magazine* and already the critical weapons are being sharpened for it. This will be the first time he has taken refuge on the stage from novel writing.

At the professional matinee last Sunday of his comedy, "The Torch Bearers," George Kelly indicated that he has the modesty of nonchalance. Coming out to make a curtain speech he became seemingly confidential with the first two or three rows—presumably because there were no critics sitting there. From the back of the house came cries of "louder" from those who felt entitled to a free speech as well as free seats. Said Kelly in a loud tone:

"But it isn't important."

The public who have been attending "R. U. R." at the Garrick Theater and wondering how to pronounce the last name of the author, Karel Capek, will be immensely relieved to have that burden taken off their mind. It is uttered thus, "Shah-peck," with the accent on the first syllable, as in disgust.

Now that this matter has been settled something about Capek and his brother might be in order. These Czecho-Slovakians, who collaborated on "The Insect Comedy," are both young and are inclined to be revolutionary in their plays, a tendency of the young which is not confined to Czecho-Slovakia. Karel is avowedly a writer, while his brother, Josef, is a cubist painter and an author when sidetracked. He came into the writing of "The Insect Comedy" because of the picturesque elements, bugs being inherently more adapted to cubists than to dramatists.

William A. Brady is said to be spending on the production of the Capek comedy as much as $80,000, not to mention sleepless nights. Brady aims to develop this into the most ambitious effort of his life, with its butterfly act, its beetle act and its ant act, and to make the stage genuinely creepy for once.

Just by way of contrast—and possibly for relief—Brady will present at Providence to-morrow "Up She Goes," a musical comedy version of "Too Many Cooks," for which Frank Craven himself whipped the book into shape when not writing plays with his other hand. Harry Tierney and Joseph McCarthy of "Irene" accumulated the score and lyrics. Donald Brian and Gloria Foy will have the principal roles in the show, which will be the first musical offering Brady has made since his daughter Alice grew out of stage pigtails.

John Emerson and Anita Loos, who have hitherto been confined to the movie scenario tier, have passed along to A. H. Woods the finished adaptation of a work by two Teutonic authors, Arnold and Bauch, called "The Whole Town Is Talking," until the cost of this title in electric light has been figured out. It deals with a small town youth of inconsiderable personality, who is made out to be a rural Romeo to impress a young woman from the city that the town has its points. Emerson will direct it and John Cumberland will suppress himself in it.

Edward Knoblock has just won a race against the transatlantic steamship service which was to determine whether the playwright could do a play more quickly than a liner could do a voyage. Recently Knoblock, who had his name featured in the adaptation of Douglas Fairbanks's "Three Musketeers," received an offer from the film star to make "Monsieur Beaucaire" pliable for the screen as his next picture. Regretfully Knoblock declined, explaining that he was already under contract with Charles B. Cochran, London producer, to write a play for him called "The Lullaby," and that the screen must somehow get along without his aid.

Then Fairbanks came back with such a flattering offer that Knoblock went to Cochran in London in great perturbation of mind.

"My goodness," he said, mopping his brow, "I never heard of so much money in my life, at least for a scenario."

"Well," said Cochran, "I don't want to clog the wheels of progress."

"Tell you what I'll do," volunteered Knoblock. "I've got one act of the old thing already written, and I'll hop on the boat and see if I can't finish the rest of it on the trip over with you."

Which he did, spending sleepless nights composing "The Lullaby." The rest of the passenger list, as usual, were rooting hard for the ship to get in many hours ahead of time, but Knoblock, driving his typewriter to his limit, was cheering feverishly every time it lost speed. And talent once more triumphed over mere mechanism, for it might be said that he dotted the last "I" just before he landed, since he had the play finished at 2 A. M., just in time to pass it through the Customs House as a foreign work of art.

It is a play dealing with France of the Empire period, about 1860, and will be uncoiled in London by Cochran this fall.

"Lawful Larceny," according to all the diagnosticians, was due to go the way of all royalties in Philadelphia the last week. It was expected that the playing time there would be kept open for Pauline Frederick in "The Guilty One," now in Chicago, which would indicate that she would round upon the East sooner than was anticipated.

At the time of going to press A. H. Woods had not yet decided whether "The Love Child" should be kept alive, but it was noticeable that he was passing out cigars like a proud father.

Arthur Hopkins began rehearsals during the last week of "Hamlet," with John Barrymore as virtually the only member of the lineup called for practice. The matter of who would play *Othello* still seemed to be one of those Eleusinian mysteries. Incidentally, Hopkins said that the report that he would revive "Peter Pan," with Genevieve Tobin as *Peter*, was simply a flash in the pan.

Robert Edmond Jones, scenic designer for Shakespeare by appointment, is said to be writing his opinion of that well known author, particularly with regard to "Hamlet." Possibly some medium will now be asked to get in touch with Shakespeare and elicit his opinion of Robert Edmond Jones.

Two Hopkins ventures are meeting opposite fortunes on the road, though their business was not so divergent in New York, which would tend to show that the road has a way of making up its own mind nowadays and that "100 nights in New York" now mean less than "Ten Nights in a Bar Room." "Anna Christie," with Pauline Lord, is having prosperity showered down on it, while "The Hairy Ape," with Louis Wolheim, is having it more and more clearly shown to him that this is no world for him.

Eugene O'Neill is reported to be writing a woman's play, and Ethel Barrymore, who is eager to become one of that growing band of players who can say, along with Willard Mack, that they have done an O'Neill play at least once, is understood to have first call on the piece. Meanwhile "Rose Bernd" continues to sell out at the Longacre, and the end is not yet, so that the time appointed for her to do *Rosalind* in "As You Like It" is still around the corner.

Hopkins, by the way, will probably revive "The Jest" next year, but it will be sent on tour, and John and Lionel will not be the twain who will make astounding faces at each other. Meanwhile the chances that Lionel will do O'Neill's "The Fountain" approach the German mark as a minimum.

Leo Carrillo was due in town over the week end with the skeletonized cast for "Mike Angelo," consisting of the two other players besides himself who walked on with the play in the Pacific coast tryout. Three other players will be sprinkled with the cast and the whole will stirred out of town in two weeks. Oliver Morosco himself is expected to come East to grease the skids for the piece.

The latest name which bobbed to the surface for James T. Powers's musical play was "Hippity Hop," but doubtless it will relinquish the struggle by the time these words are cold.

"The Romantic Age," the A. A. Milne comedy now hovering near, has the distinction of having been tried out by two amateur organizations, and still surviving for the professional stage. Not only was it given a capable production by the Amateur Comedy Club here, but another group of fledglings poured forth their hearts in it at Summit, N. J., last spring. It was here that Frederick Stanhope, who is to present it with Hugh Ford, saw it performed and decided what he'd do about it. Incidentally, the leading role was played by Beatrice Miles, who thus won a chance to speak for herself in "The Evergreen Lady," marking the first time, as they say, on any stage.

Age Before Beauty.

Play.	Presented.
Kiki	Nov. 29, '21
Captain Applejack	Dec. 30
Chauve-Souris	Feb. 4, '22
The Cat and the Canary	Feb. 7
Partners Again	May 1
Kempy	May 15
Abie's Irish Rose	May 23
Ziegfeld's Follies of 1922	June 5
Whispering Wires	Aug. 7
Blossom Time (2d eng.)	Aug. 7
Shore Leave	Aug. 8
The Monster	Aug. 9
East Side, West Side	Aug. 15
The Old Soak	Aug. 22
George White's Scandals	Aug. 23
The Gingham Girl	Aug. 28
The Torch Bearers	Aug. 29
So This Is London!	Aug. 30
Her Temporary Husband	Aug. 31
Molly Darling	Sept. 1
Better Times	Sept. 2
Sally, Irene and Mary	Sept. 4
A Fantastic Fricasee	Sept. 11
Why Men Leave Home	Sept. 12
Greenwich Village Follies	Sept. 12
The Awful Truth	Sept. 18
It's a Boy	Sept. 19
Orange Blossoms	Sept. 19
Banco	Sept. 20
Passing Show of 1922	Sept. 20
East of Suez	Sept. 21
The Exciters	Sept. 22
La Tendresse	Sept. 25
Spite Corner	Sept. 25
On the Stairs	Sept. 25
Rose Bernd	Sept. 26
Loyalties	Sept. 27
Thin Ice	Sept. 30
Malvaloca	Oct. 2
The Yankee Princess	Oct. 2
The Lady in Ermine	Oct. 2
R. U. R.	Oct. 9
The Faithful Heart	Oct. 10
Queen o' Hearts	Oct. 10
Swifty	Oct. 16
To Love	Oct. 17

Basil Sydney, who plays the leading role in "R. U. R." at the Garrick.

MY DEAR SIR:

The Epilogue of "R. U. R."

To the Dramatic Editor:

In the general chorus of enthusiasm for the Theater Guild's production of Capek's sensational "R. U. R." there have been strains of definite and, to me, inexplicable dissatisfaction with the conclusion of this play. The dissonant notes have ranged all the way from Mr. Corbin's charge that the finale was irrelevant, to Heywood Broun's protest that the entire last act was incongruously "sentimental" and unnecessary. These objections seem to me to be not only captious but contrary to the spirit of the performance. And, what is more, they are all fundamentally false.

In the first place, the extraordinary third act has ended, after thirty minutes of twitching suspense, on a plane of tremendous intensity. But the power impelling this climax has been the force of negation. We have witnessed in half an hour the last stand of civilization. The machine has been conquered by the very products of machinery, the creators have been smashed by their own creations. The human race, with the exception of one old man, has been wiped out. It is incredible that the play should end on such a note. Destruction is a means, not an end—a platitude that applies even to such a detail as the technic of the drama. The struggle to ascend, the push up from the depths, the eternal desire of life to persist and vary is surely no less "relevant" than the agencies of destruction and death. If the playwright had brought down his final curtain on the victory of the soulless robots, he would have done less than half of his work as artist. The upward curve must be suggested if not charted.

But, from a consideration of actual theater rather than abstract drama, the omission of the epilogue would be even more incomprehensible. This epilogue does something that the three preceding acts never achieved: it creates—and maintains—a spiritual mood, which swings the entire play to sudden and surprising heights. Irony has already reached the peak, social satire has been combined with terror to bring about a vigorously melodramatic climax. And then—as Molnar in the middle of "Liliom" left realism for fantasy—Capek lifts the last act from the level of physical action by an emotional purity which the other scenes have scarcely suggested. It is exaltation instead of excitement, poetry rather than propaganda. If it is whimsical (and it has become the fashion to pronounce the word with a sophisticated condescension) it is whimsy of the highest order—an end that, without disturbing the strength of Capek's powerful parable, has its own integrity and is as complete as it is inevitable.

LOUIS UNTERMEYER.
New York, Oct. 13, 1922.